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Komitet'). The Tribal Committees of the lower order were later described as 'Native Soviets' ('Tuzsovety') of which there were 400 all over the Far East and Far North. The most remarkable fact about this tribal administration was that participation in tribal and native Soviets was not limited by class criteria.

This idyllic state of affairs could not last long. From one plenary meeting of the Committee of the North to the next the intransigence of its more radically minded members increased. In 1929 the Committee firmly decided to apply the principles of class struggle to the Far North, and from 1930 onwards, the tribal administration was abandoned. Regular organs of local government ranging from village Soviets to 'National Areas' ('Okrugs') were created instead. This meant in fact the end of the 'native reserves' which the Russian anthropologists had advocated in the early years of the Soviet régime. Under the new set-up Russian and other European Party and State officials were able to increase their influence in the running of native affairs. The natives were linked politically and administratively as closely as possible with the metropolitan territories of the U.S.S.R. In 1935, the Committee of the North itself was disbanded.

By the time of its abolition the Committee had lost a great deal of its previous importance. Many of its original duties had been taken over either by the Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route, 'Glavsevmorput', or by local government organs. The Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route, which had at its disposal a large staff of experts on nationalities problems, was originally launched as a body with extremely wide powers. Among other things, it was supposed to look after the well-being of the Far Northern tribes, direct cultural work among them, organize health services and help to promote their 'sovietization'. In the autumn of 1938 the Soviet Government decided that 'Glavsevmorput' could not carry out these tasks properly. A decree of the Council of People's Commissars stipulated that it was to hand over to the territorial administrations all enterprises and institutions which were not directly connected with the development of the Northern Sea Route.[2]

COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATORS

The abolition of the Committee of the North in 1935, and the curtailing of the powers of the 'Glavsevmorput' in 1938, increased the responsibilities of the administrative authorities and party organizations of Khabarovsk. It cannot be said that the latter have shown great enthusiasm for work in the National Areas and National Districts of the small nationalities. In fact, up to 1939 most of the officials posted to distant parts of the Far Eastern (later Khabarovsk) Territory went

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there as a punishment. People who were an embarrassment to the authorities, for one reason or another, were frequently sent to the Arctic regions as administrators and Party secretaries. Most cases of abuse of which such ill-suited administrators had been guilty in distant territories were hushed up, but occasionally they became public, as in the case of the Soviet Commander of the Wrangel Island,* which is part of the Chukcha National Area, and situated off its Arctic coast.

The commander, whose name was Semenchuk, had committed the most outrageous arbitrary acts against both Chukchi and Eskimos, the native population of the island. He and his assistant, Startsev, had caused the death of a number of natives, but the Wrangel Island scandal would probably not have come to light had they not also assassinated the local Russian doctor. The two Soviet administrators were brought to Moscow as defendants in a big trial in which Vyshinsky himself acted as prosecutor. A sixty-five page Vyshinsky speech contains an exhaustive description of the Semenchuk régime on Wrangel Island. Semenchuk's authoritarian idea of the role of a Soviet administrator in the land of the Chukchi and Eskimos was summarised in the following pronouncement which he had made. 'I am the GPU here; I am the court, I am the Public Prosecutor. I have the power of life and death.'

Semenchuk and Startsev were sentenced to death and executed in 1936, but it is still a mystery how the Soviet Government could entrust the strategically important Wrangel Island to an outright criminal. Semenchuk had been in prison for the theft of silver cutlery from the Soviet Embassy in Teheran shortly before being dispatched to the Far North.[3]

The case of Semenchuk and Startsev is obviously an extreme one. There is no reason to doubt that some of the administrators are ardent idealists, determined to improve living conditions and promote education among the local peoples. If we can believe the Secretary of the Department of Cadres of the Khabarovsk Territorial Committee of the Communist Party, there has been a better selection of administrators for the distant areas of the Far East since 1939. The secretary in question had promised in that year that Party posts in these territories would be given in future only to particularly trustworthy persons. He had said,

* Russian sovereignty over Wrangel Island was established only with some difficulty Both Canada and the United States had striven to attach the island which has an area of 2,700 square miles to their respective territories. The Canadians established their claim by wintering on the island from 1921. They reasserted it by hoisting the flag there in 1921, and in 1922 the Canadian Prime Minister solemnly proclaimed the annexation of the island in a statement before the Ottawa Parliament. The Soviet régime can rightly claim to have rescued Wrangel Island for Russia. In 1924 the crew of the Soviet gunboat 'Red October' took it over and expelled the only Canadian who lived there, together with a group of 'anti-Soviet' Eskimos, who, they asserted, were engaged in illegal hunting of fur animals. The Soviet authorities then brought their own colonists from the mainland, mostly Chukchi and Eskimos, with a few Russians.

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indeed, 'The further away we send a man, the more we must be able to trust him'.[4] It can be taken for granted that a man whom the Communist Party considers particularly trustworthy will be a hard-working official, and that he will not commit any crimes such as those of which Semenchuk and Startsev had been convicted. But a trustworthy communist is not necessarily a man who understands the mentality of the Far Eastern aborigines, and who deals with their problems in the best way.

NATIVES, STATE TRUSTS AND FORCED LABOUR

In addition to the Party and the territorial administration, there is a third influential factor in the Far East which has a great impact on the 'natives', namely the big State capitalist organizations of Kamchatka, Chukotka and the territories around the Okhotsk Sea. Instead of assisting and strengthening native economy the Soviet régime encouraged the growth of State companies such as the 'Kamchatka Limited Company' (later known as 'Glavkamchatrybprom' – Kamchatka Chief Administration for the Fishing Industry), the 'State Reindeer Trust', the 'Dalrybtrest' (Far Eastern Fishing Trust) and 'Soyuzpushnina', the State organization for fur trading. Soviet experts on the Far East themselves have admitted that these enterprises employed people who were guided by a 'narrow-minded business attitude' and who discharged their duties in a 'crudely materialistic way'. All they wanted was to fulfil the target figures of the state plan. They were not interested in assisting the natives either by supplying the most essential food commodities or by encouraging cultural work. The enterprises concerned, in particular the Kamchatka Company and the Reindeer Trust, seized land, and hunting and fishing grounds traditionally belonging to the natives. Even land owned by newly established collective farms of reindeer-breeders was arbitrarily confiscated by State trusts.[5]

Another State enterprise, the previously mentioned 'Dalstroy', which operates around the Okhotsk Sea, has also greatly affected the life of the 'natives' who live in its territory. The first director of Dalstroy, E. Berzin, pointed out in 1936 that the trust had opened schools and hospitals in all centres of the native population. The budget of the native communities ('National Districts') had increased almost ten times during five years.[6] What Berzin did not say was that the native schools and hospitals had been built with the profits which Dalstroy had made by exploiting forced labour. As a matter of fact, some of the schools of which Berzin boasted are 'mixed schools', which are attended both by natives and by children of convicts who were born in captivity and taken away from their mothers.[7] In the area controlled by the Dalstroy we thus meet the most sinister aspect of the 'Soviet nationalities policy', namely, its